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# **Dulles's Record in the Middle East: Some Signal Successes, More Failures**

**Debits: Arms and Cotton  
Deals, Aswan Dam and  
British - French - Israeli  
Invasion of Egypt.**

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Post-Dispatch.

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WASHINGTON, March 9.

**J**UST past his sixty-ninth birthday, in his fifth year in the self-defeating office of Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles has been for many months trying to clamp the lid on a volcano.

That volcano is the Middle East, where the dark and brooding passions—religious, economic, political—of the Arab-Israeli dispute have produced several limited wars and threaten constantly to generate a large war. It is the area where, for reasons complex far beyond the complexity of Dulles's personality, American policy has suffered the greatest reverses of the past four years.

What may now be in prospect in the Middle East, if certain hopeful signs are not deceptive, is an uneasy truce enforced by a United Nations Emergency Force. The lava in the volcano will, temporarily at least, cease to flow. The pillar of smoke will subside and in the relatively quiet interval the task of peacemaking can be started; a task calling for years of patient effort.

Dulles's principal function as Secretary of State has been to hold the lid on one boiling situation after another so that it would not foam over in open war. The bloody conflict in Korea was ended and the Communist and the anti-Communist armies face each other across an uneasy truce line. Similarly in Indochina, an uncertain truce keeps the two forces apart. In Berlin, they confront each other against the background of the explosive potential of the rebellious satellites. These are all lids held precariously in place.

The chief difference in the Middle East is a commodity vital to the life of Western Europe—oil. If Communism succeeds in establishing itself at key points in the Middle East, then Europe and the West will be subject to Moscow blackmail. That is why the outcome of the Middle East dispute has been followed so breathlessly. It is why it is important to review, as objectively as possible the moves and the motivations that during the past two years brought war and may now be subsiding in still another uneasy truce.

## **Started By Israeli Raid.**

The cycle, for reasons of convenience, can be dated from Feb. 28, 1955, when Israel conducted a raid on the Gaza strip that resulted in 69 Egyptian and 20 Israeli casualties. For the Israelis, this was retaliation for a whole series of Egyptian commando raids that had taken a heavy toll of life and property. But this action started the lava boiling up and in the view of the State Department it made it more difficult to come to any understanding with Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The central figure in the drama, Nasser is a brilliant (or he accepts the advice of brilliant advisers) intensely ambitious, intensely energetic, volatile leader of a people who have caught the fever of nationalism in its most acute form. Some would compare his book, "Revolution," with Hitler's "Mein Kampf" as an exposition of how to overthrow the existing order.

All through the early months of 1955, Dulles was directing negotiations with Nasser over arms for Egypt. This had begun earlier—on Dec. 10, 1952—when the United States and Egypt concluded a cash reimbursable military assistance agreement under the Mutual Defense Act of 1948. An Egyptian military mission visited the United States in the spring of 1953 to implement this agreement, but because of the increasing violence over the presence of British troops in the Suez base area, nothing came of it.

Several attempts were made to work out an arms deal after July of 1954, when the British signed an agreement to leave the Suez base. But nothing came of these efforts, which went on through the end of June, 1955, when the Egyptian government submitted a list of the arms it desired.

## **About the Writers**

**B**RIG. GEN. THOMAS R. PHILLIPS, military analyst of the Post-Dispatch, and Richard Dudman, a Washington correspondent of the Post-Dispatch, have returned recently from the Middle East. They talked with heads of state, high officials and ordinary citizens in these restless countries to obtain a comprehensive picture of the political, economic and military aspects of the area.

The reports presented here are the first of a series which will discuss the problems of the Middle East and their relation to diplomatic moves by the United States to offset the threat of Communist infiltration.

Marquis W. Childs, a Washington correspondent of the Post-Dispatch, has followed closely the efforts of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to contain the Communist threat to the strategic Middle East and gives his appraisal of the measure of success that Dulles has achieved.

## **Cotton Plays Its Role.**

In trying to reckon the score on Dulles's performance in the Middle East, there must be taken into account here one of those factors that inevitably limit a Secretary of State. Cotton and the great surpluses of cotton accumulated in this country put a brake on any arms deal with the United States. Egypt could pay only in cotton, which is its one cash crop, and Southern Senators in important committee chairmanships made it plain that any encouragement of Egyptian cotton exports would get the State Department in trouble.

The Department makes an important point of the fact that military aid through direct grant was also rejected by Egypt two years ago. Nasser has since said that the United States sought to impose conditions on direct military assistance and that Egypt was being asked to join an "alliance."

"The proposed grant military assistance was in no sense an alliance," the State Department told its diplomats around the world in a confidential memorandum. "It would not commit Egypt in any way to military action. The Government of Egypt

ernments which have signed such agree-ments. The provisions covering grant military aid agreements and contained in the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1954. They require no secret or onerous undertakings. They maintain complete recognition of the sovereignty of the participating states."

One requirement, however, is that an American military mission supervise or at least follow the distribution and use of the arms supplied. Nasser, it is believed,

## Credits: Withdrawals From Gaza Strip and Aqaba Area, Period of Quiet for Peacemaking.

objected to the presence of such a mis- sion in Egypt.

Far more important, he had already begun the first tentative negotiations with Moscow for Communist arms. The exact date is not clear, but some time in the spring of 1955, Henry A. Byroade, then American ambassador in Cairo, informed Washington that the Communists were proposing to furnish arms to Egypt in return for Egyptian cotton. This is a focal point in the accusation that Dulles failed to act swiftly and decisively to keep Russian influence out of the Middle East.

Both Dulles and President Eisenhower have been criticized because they failed to confront the Communist leaders at the summit conference in Geneva in July, 1955, with their knowledge of the arms deal and their conviction of what a threat to peace it was. But those who participated in the Geneva talks say that the United States did not have firm knowledge of the arms deal. And they add that the summit talks, called on the insistence of Sir Anthony Eden and his fellow Conservatives who were going into an election campaign, were only intended to deal with generalities. The Geneva meeting ended with a highly generalized statement by the Big Four powers of their desire for peace.

## CIA Knew Details.

Contrary to this defense of the fact that the arms deal was never mentioned, Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, has said that by late spring his CIA had all the details of Egypt's agreement with the Communists. It was not until Sept. 27 that Nasser announced he had agreed to exchange cotton for Czechoslovak arms. He accused the West of violating the tri-partite declaration of 1950 guaranteeing the borders of Israel and its Arab neighbors by secretly arming Israel. At a news conference on Oct. 4, Secretary of State Dulles said he had twice taken up the arms deal with the then Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov.

On Oct. 20 the first Soviet vessel carrying arms arrived at Alexandria. If Nasser had needed any spur for his ambitions, this was it. The provocative broadcasts of the Cairo radio, directed at Israel, France, the United States and Britain, grew more violent in tone. The Arabs in Algeria were incited to blood-thirsty revolt against the French and the commando raids increased along Israel's borders.

would not contribute to an arms race. But it was scarcely more than six months later, on the day he nationalized the Suez canal, that Nasser openly boasted his armaments had come from "Russia, Russia, Russia."

## Israel Launches Attack.

The policy of the United States—and it has a futile look from hindsight at least—was to try to prevent an arms race, even though Soviet munitions were going to Egypt and Israel had begun to increase its purchases, with the knowledge if not the encouragement of Washington, from French, Canadian and other sources. The mounting tension, fed by the growing Israeli fear that it would be outdistanced

by Egypt, led directly to the attack Israel launched on Oct. 29 with the declared intention of eliminating the commando bases in the Sinai peninsula and establishing access to the sea which was denied in the Gulf of Aqaba by Egyptian guns and by Egyptian refusal, despite a United Nations resolution of five years ago, to permit Israeli ships to pass through the Suez canal.

An important element in the two years of confusion and controversy was the issue of the Aswan dam on the Nile river. This was a grandiose project at the center of Nasser's dream of power and glory which would theoretically increase Egypt's arable land by more than half. Some such outlet is essential since the population, growing at a fantastic rate, is confined to a narrow strip of irrigated land along the river.

## Joint Offer Made.

On Dec. 18, 1955, Britain and the United States joined in an offer to help with construction of the dam. A little later, the International Bank came into the picture and Eugene Black, president of the bank, twice visited Cairo to talk with Nasser about the project. Black was of the opinion that it was practicable. It has since come out, however, that countries concerned with storage of water at the headwaters of the Nile—Ethiopia and the Sudan—were indignant that the United States had not consulted them before making the proposal to Nasser.

As for the Egyptian President, he was almost as ambiguous and evasive as he had been with respect to the arms deal. He seemed to be trying to get Russia and the United States to bid against each other for the privilege of building the dam.

Early last year, Nasser's Government began issuing statements, intimating that Moscow was eager to help with the project. The dam would cost hundreds of millions of dollars and call for extensive resources in trained men and materials. All of this would have to come from outside Egypt, which except for Cairo with its veneer of westernism, is a primitive country. Because so much of the country's single cash crop, cotton, was going to buy arms, the practical economics of the dam began to look less attractive.

## Turned Down on Dam.

Returning from consultations in Cairo, the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, Ahmed Hussein, announced that his Government was prepared to accept Western help. He called on Secretary Dulles the next day to be informed that Britain and the United States were no longer interested in the dam. In a statement subsequently released, Dulles went on to say that he considered the Egyptian economy a poor risk for such a large investment.

The abruptness of this action and the harshness of Dulles's published statement have been widely criticized. The Secretary seemed to have perpetrated a kind of April's Fool joke, holding out the pocketbook and then suddenly jerking it out of reach. This reporter talked with Hussein the day after he had seen Dulles. His story was that if only Dulles had told him that the decision had been postponed he could have pacified Cairo.

But in Dulles's defense it must be said that he had been informed the Senate intended to attach a rider to the economic aid bill providing that none of the money should go for the Aswan dam. To forestall this move, Dulles acted quickly, believing apparently that it was better to take the step himself rather than to wait for Senate intervention. The attitude of the cotton Senators is believed to have played a part in this threat. Another factor, of course, was the Jewish vote in the cities intensely concerned for the future of Israel. The elections were only a few weeks away.

## Nasser Seizes Canal.

Six days later, on July 26, Nasser aimed the gun at the west by nationalizing the Suez canal. In so doing, he took out of international custody and put under the jurisdiction of his own Government the waterway through which the oil vital to Europe had flowed. A grave world crisis resulted, culminating in the attack by the Israelis in which Britain and France joined.

It is in his approach to this crisis that the most severe criticism has fallen on Dulles with the charge that he allowed a condition of drift to continue at a moment when Western Europe felt the issue was one of life or death. The peripatetic Secretary was in

Washington and flew to Lon-

don against a background of rumor that Britain and France meant to move into Egypt at once to insure continued safe operation of the canal for their ships.

On his return, meeting with a small group of newspaper reporters for one of the background sessions he frequently holds, Dulles seemed confident he had the situation well in hand. Several times he said, "we're making our plans to short-circuit the canal. We'll make it a dry ditch. Whatever it costs it will be cheaper than a war."

## West Was to Send Oil

As he discussed it, tankers would be sent on the long haul around Africa. Oil would be shipped from the Western hemisphere to make up for the deficiency in Europe's supply. For the long pull, pipelines would be built across Turkey and Israel to get around the Suez canal which, as Dulles explained it, was already out-grown.

Where would the money come from? In the first instance, the secretary said, it would come from the United States, probably in the form of loans to Britain and France from the Export-Import Bank. Private, together with public financing could be arranged for the pipelines.

Out of this session came news stories saying the United States was prepared to advance up to \$500,000,000 if necessary to help the Western allies should Nasser discriminate against their ships. This caused an unhappy reaction among the budget-balancers as the election campaign drew near.

Many gaps exist in the record of the period immediately following the nationalization of the canal and they will probably not be filled in with any certainty until years hence, when the documents of the time are published. It is believed that Dulles pulled back from his plan to make the canal "a dry ditch."

At the same time the British informed Washington that they were not interested in loans to carry them through a transition period when dollar costs would go sharply up. They pointed out that any further pressure on their precarious margin of gold and dollars would put them in jeopardy.

## Users' Group Formed.

On Aug. 23 a Suez canal users association was formed. From the first, it appears that the European allies held one view of its function and Dulles another. The Europeans wanted to utilize the association to challenge Nasser's right to run the canal and collect tolls, using force if necessary. Dulles was opposed to any show of force, realizing that such a test might come at the height of the election campaign in which the Eisenhower Administration would base its appeal on peace and prosperity.

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In London and Paris, after the attack on Egypt had failed and a cease-fire had been agreed to, this reporter talked to many high officials. Almost without exception, speaking privately, they expressed the belief that the American position on the use of the canal had grown more and more vague until, as the weeks passed, it seemed that Nasser would control the flow of oil. They felt they had no alternative but to attack.

**Weaknesses Revealed:**

Much has been written about the disastrous consequences of the attack. It shattered the former close relationship among Washington, London and Paris and that partnership is now only slowly being restored. Perhaps most serious of all, it revealed to Soviet Russia the weakness of France and Britain. Moscow had assumed that Nasser would be pushed over in a few days and the Soviets were prepared, according to sources most familiar with events in Moscow at the time, to see this happen. But when it did not come about and delay followed delay, the voice of Moscow was raised in a loud and threatening tone.

Through anxious weeks Dulles has been working at the delicate and extremely difficult task of putting back together in some fashion the pieces of the Egyptian-Israeli puzzle. After exhausting negotiations that frequently threatened to break down, the Israelis were persuaded to move their forces from the last of the territory they had taken. Diplomats give Dulles high marks for his skill and persistence in carrying this through.

For sheer physical stamina, the Secretary's performance is little short of amazing. It was scarcely more than four months ago that he underwent a major intestinal operation for cancer. Within three weeks of that operation he was again directing American foreign policy and his energy and determination have never flagged. So far as the outsider can judge, Dulles has put his illness behind him, although others who have had such operations have had to undergo exacting and exhausting post-operative treatment.

**Too Early for Judgment.**

But heroic as this performance is, it will count for little if the final verdict on his Middle Eastern policy is failure. It is much too early, of course, for a final judgment. With the lid clamped on to suppress the immediate threat of renewed warfare, we may well see a period of many months in which the crisis of the Middle East drops out of the headlines.

**Lengthy Holding Operation.**

In one area after another, and perhaps also now in the Middle East, there is a prolonged holding operation. It is part of the responsibility of the free world, and in particular of America as the most powerful leader in the free world, to hold steadfast in Formosa, Korea, Indochina and Berlin. This is the long hard task of containing Communism over the years with the only light at the end of the tunnel the hope that Communism may evolve away from aggressive imperialism.

But it is only part of the task of the West. A further and more onerous responsibility is to try to negotiate away the causes of tension in specific areas. And it is in this department that when the final score is reckoned with, Dulles's deficiencies may seem most conspicuous.